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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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NATIVE AMERICAN CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR
REGIONAL WHIP

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Dan Brouillette
Secretary, United States Department of Energy

Sent via email to electronically to Conner W. Brace, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for House Affairs
Conner.Brace@hq.doe.gov

Dear Secretary Dan Brouillette:

As the proud representative in Congress of Sandia National Laboratories, one of the crown jewels of the nation's research and innovation ecosystem that employ thousands of our best and brightest scientists and engineers, I urge you to ensure that the capabilities of our labs and the expertise of their professional staff are employed in the battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

Our labs already contribute in meaningful ways to U.S. foreign policy, domestic energy and security needs, and, at a more local level, to the strength of communities across America through partnerships with universities, businesses, Native American tribes, states and cities. Much of the expertise that enables our labs to make crosscutting breakthroughs and lead in innovation can also be used to take on this challenge – in fact, modeling and supercomputing capabilities at the labs are being used to understand how the virus might spread and evaluate the potential effectiveness of drugs, and user facilities have helped scientists understand the structure of the virus. Moving forward, there are many opportunities for the labs to play a role – for example, 3D printing technologies could be used to help address shortages of medical supplies and hospital beds.

Some of the legislation put forward in Congress to address this crisis would provide additional funding to the Department to support these and other efforts, and I encourage you to do what you can to increase the flexibility for employees to work on this challenge using funding already appropriated to the Department, where appropriate.

I am also aware that expanding work in this new area could open up the private contractors that operate the labs to liability concerns. I encourage you to work with the lab operators to provide additional indemnification protection, similar to what the Department has granted to labs dealing with other crises such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, so that they can confidently move forward with this important work.

I appreciate the work that you and the Department's national laboratories are already doing to help address this pandemic, and encourage you to act to ensure that the full extent of our labs' capabilities can be brought to bear. I stand ready to work with you and provide any assistance you need from Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deb Haaland".

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress